

LITERATURE SUMMARIES

Adler, Rachel. *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998.

Summary: Adler draws upon the historical evolution of Jewish sexual ethics, to justify forming a new ethical code seeking “holiness” in the context of many diverse relationships.

According to Rachel Adler, a Jewish feminist theologian, non-Orthodox Jews in the United States need to think seriously about sexual ethics. These Jews understandably flee from texts such as Leviticus 18 (a Jewish legal code frequently criticized by non-Orthodox Jews for its patriarchal and anti-gay stance on sexual ethics). Unfortunately, these Jews adapt too easily to the norms of the United States’ “highly sexualized society” (126), which ignores the role of “holiness” in the sexual experience (127). Adler seeks to forge a middle path between clinging to Leviticus 18 and ignoring sexual ethics entirely.

To validate this idea of a new code of sexual ethics, Adler examines historical evolution in Jewish legal attitudes toward polygyny, child molestation, sex with slaves, and rape. Early Jewish attitudes toward each of these acts were generally more permissive than the stances taken by later generations. Jewish law evolved to suit the needs of contemporary Jews in each age. Thus, in today’s world, Jews need to tackle pressing issues of sexual ethics, especially those brought up by feminist and gay rights movements. Jewish communities must discuss how modern Jews can “express their sexuality in a holy way” (133).

Upon what might this holiness be based? Adler draws upon the Song of Songs, which she sees embodying an egalitarian “mutuality” between two sexual partners (135). She contrasts the Song to many Biblical and Talmudic sources portraying normative sexuality as male dominance and control over women. In a new sexual ethics, humankind’s “sexual diversity” and “yearning for communion” can be seen as reflections of God’s “infinite and unity” (118). Thus, Jews should acknowledge a range of respectful, egalitarian relationships as “holy,” even outside the context of marriage.

Biale, David. *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America*. New York: Basic, 1992.

Summary: David Biale holds that traditional Judaism misrepresents and marginalizes the existence of premarital sex throughout Jewish history.

In a wide-ranging study of Jewish attitudes toward sex, historian David Biale rejects notions that Jews have traditionally been either sex-positive or sex-negative. He argues that Judaism has always been a “profoundly ambivalent culture” sexually (5).

Jewish sexual history has been a matter of “real people struggling with questions” about sexuality, rather than a “dogmatic” history shaped by the mainstream religious texts (230). For example, while medieval rabbis warned against premarital sex, Jewish commoners took to mixed-gender intermingling in public spaces. Sex outside of marriage occurred “with some hard-to-determine frequency” (68), and was celebrated in popular literature.

Biale's book is concerned with the continual tension between the Jewish traditions of sexual liberation and sexual repression (11). Today, he notices that many Orthodox as well as feminist writers portray a positive Jewish vision of sexuality (whether within marriage only, or within a broader range of egalitarian relationships). Biale argues that the Orthodox writers are trying to prevent intermarriage (by encouraging Jews that Jewish marriage can be sexual) and are trying to modernize Orthodoxy in general, to make it sound sexually and psychologically appealing to non-Orthodox Jews. According to Biale, Jewish attitudes toward marital sex have been ambiguous throughout history. The same is true for unmarried sex. Therefore, the Orthodox representation of marital sex as good versus premarital sex as bad is a modern construction, built for a particular social agenda.

Besides serving as a history, Biale's study is an exercise in literary criticism. He seeks to discover the voices that have been suppressed in the mainstream texts of Jewish history, and in doing so, to "allow the exploration of a multiplicity of desires: what has been marginalized now needs to be incorporated" (229).

Biale, Rachel. *Women and Jewish Law: The Essential Texts, Their History, and Their Relevance for Today*. New York: Schocken, 1984.

Summary: Rachel Biale explains the importance of marriage as the accepted context for sex within traditional Judaism.

A feminist Talmud scholar, Biale studies the Talmud's views about women and sexuality. (The Talmud is a collection of rabbis' interpretations of the Hebrew Bible, and was compiled between the second and fifth centuries CE.) Biale explains that, in Jewish tradition, heterosexual "marriage occupies the central place in personal and communal life in traditional Jewish society" (68). Therefore, sexual connections outside of marriage are fraught with warnings and complications.

The Talmud defines premarital sex as promiscuity. Although promiscuity does not rank as low as adultery, and is not technically prohibited under certain conditions, it is also frowned upon by traditional Jewish societies. Consequently, Jewish societies throughout history have made premarital sex difficult by socially separating the two genders before marriage. However, in all ages there have been Jews who transgressed the social norms of sexuality. "Contrary to popular notions that sex outside of marriage is a product of the modern sexual revolution, halakhic [Jewish legal] codes and responsa [rabbinic legal interpretations] indicate its presence in traditional Jewish society" (192).

Blank, Hanne. "The 'Big O' Also Means 'Olam.'" In *Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism*. Ed. Danya Ruttenberg. Seattle: Seal Press, 2001, 194-205.

Summary: Blank maintains that premarital sex can be ethical in a Jewish sense.

Hanne Blank, a liberal Jewish sex educator, defends her sexual philosophy by appealing to Jewish values. She describes her work counseling a variety of people on matters of sexual

ethnics and sexual health – such as premarital sex, bondage, homosexuality, and other controversial issues. For Blank, helping people with sexual questions is “a matter of *tikkun olam* – of helping to heal the world” (201), particularly, of helping to heal the “pain and misery” sometimes caused by sex (195).

Blank maintains that teaching sexual ethics, with their personal and social considerations, rather than teaching black-and-white moral commandments applied to “isolated” behaviors (198), is faithful to the complex, multifaceted debate styles of the Talmudic rabbis. Blank sees many sex acts outside of marriage as potentially valuable and life-affirming. Overall, she wishes to combine “yesterday’s wisdom and today’s immediacies” (205) in her work as a Jewish sex educator in the modern world.

Bloch, Ariel, and Chana Bloch. *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Random House, 1995.

Summary: Bloch and Bloch read a Biblical text as a celebration of a premarital sexual relationship.

The translators Ariel and Chana Bloch translate and comment on the Song of Songs, which they think involves sex between a married and unmarried partner. To situate the Song in its Biblical context, they explain that “at issue... is not premarital sex but property: an unmarried women’s sexuality was the property of her father.” Therefore, Biblical laws regulated the sexuality of unmarried women, in order to protect their fathers’ claim to them as property (13).

Based on a study of the Song’s sources and literary development, Bloch and Bloch read the text as a celebration of sex between a man and “an unmarried woman” for pleasurable, not procreative, purposes (14). They disagree with interpretations of the Song that remove it from the level of physical, “human love” (35) in order to allegorize or spiritualize it. (Many traditional Jewish interpretations of the Song, for instance, have seen the male character as God, the female character as the collective Jewish people, and the entire Song as an allegory of the binding love between the two parties.)

Borowitz, Eugene. *Choosing a Sex Ethic*. New York: Schocken, 1969.

Summary: Borowitz recommends marriage as the proper Jewish context for sex.

Reform Judaism is a liberal denomination that asks individual Jews to choose those aspects of the tradition that are most relevant to their lives. Eugene Borowitz, a Reform rabbi, wrote this book in 1969, at the peak of the sexual revolution in the United States. As a Reform rabbi writing in a turbulent cultural period, Borowitz addresses the ethics of premarital sex. He expresses his belief that the reader should make up his or her own mind about a personal ethical code regarding premarital sex. He presents several ethical codes available to the modern Jew, each with pros and cons:

- The “ethics of healthy orgasm” (13), focused exclusively on the individual’s sexual satisfaction, without regard for the welfare of others.

- The “ethics of mutual consent” (61), focused on sexual pleasure between mutually consenting partners.
- The “love ethic” (17), approving sex only in relationships of love, although not necessarily marriage. Borowitz sees this ethic at work in the *pilagshut* relationship (108), a controversial type of relationship in Jewish history in which a man is allowed to have sex with an unmarried woman.
- The “marriage ethic” (19), which sanctions sex only within a heterosexual marriage, conducted according to traditional Jewish law.

Borowitz presents a detailed, balanced look at each of these four ethical codes. He also traces rabbinic debates about premarital sex, while arguing that the very nature of Jewish law allows for the “evolution” of permitted behaviors (49).

In his conclusion, Borowitz still leaves the reader with the “autonomy” (3) to decide his or her own view on premarital sex. However, Borowitz himself endorses the marriage ethic. He thinks Jews should strive for “moral excellence” (119), which he sees embodied in the long-term, formalized, public commitment of marriage. Marriage has preserved the Jewish people throughout history by enabling healthy families and relationships. It has offered personal satisfaction and “continual personal growth” (113) to countless Jews, and has enabled Jews to see each other as holistic persons rather than as sex objects.

Boteach, Shmuel. *Dating Secrets of the Ten Commandments*. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

Summary: Boteach advises single young adults to practice abstinence before marriage, thus preserving the quality of marital sex.

As a Hasidic rabbi, Shmuel Boteach brings a traditional approach to the topic of sexuality, but writes in a style that is highly accessible to modern readers. In a very funny book on dating, Boteach draws parallels between Biblical stories and Jewish legends, and dating ethics appropriate for modern-day Jews.

In his chapter on the sexual aspect of relationships, “Mystery: Sexual Ethics,” Boteach argues against premarital sex. He promotes proper Jewish marital sex as “the most powerful weapon in your arsenal for achieving intimacy and commitment” (181). While marital sex preserves sex’s “mystery” and “intimacy” (179), intertwining passionate love with sex, premarital sex separates romantic love from sexual pleasure. Thus, sex becomes “boring and routine,” drained of its emotional aspect (179). Opposing the United States’ culturally prevalent negative views of both sex and marriage, Boteach seeks to replace the modern “dualism” of love-versus-sex (188) with a Jewish “holistic approach” to sex, where love and sex are unified (189). In this respect, the union of a married couple mirrors the monotheistic oneness of God. Boteach encourages both partners to imitate the image of God within them, through cultivating a meaningful married sexual relationship. “God is mysterious and you should be too” (205).

Boteach, Shmuel. *Kosher Sex: A Recipe for Passion and Intimacy*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.

Summary: Boteach holds that marriage is the only truly fulfilling context for sex.

As a Hasidic rabbi, Shmuel Boteach brings a traditional approach to the topic of sexuality, but writes in a style that is highly accessible to modern readers. In the section of his book entitled, “Sex for Single People” (143-205), Boteach relates anecdotes of single friends whose premarital sexual relationships left them feeling empty and dissatisfied. Boteach finds that premarital sex works against traditional Jewish practices promoting marital longevity and commitment. With more and more premarital sex, individuals become less and less fulfilled by the quality of their relationships. They expose too much of themselves in casual relationships. “[M]odern-day relationships... usually become the greatest source of pain and agony” in a person’s life (160).

Boteach prescribes remedies for this state of dissatisfaction. Proper Jewish marriage ensures “the unconditional love of a permanent partner” (171). Even more, marriage brings “the strong completion of our intrinsic selves” (205), as each partner’s love enables the other to recognize the image of God within (204).

Boyarin, Daniel. *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993.

Summary: Boyarin explains why traditional Judaism sees marriage as a divinely commanded, spiritual union between a man and a woman.

In order to understand observant Jewish attitudes toward premarital sex, it is important to examine how rabbinic authorities have conceptualized marriage.

Professor and Talmud scholar Daniel Boyarin (University of California, Berkeley) examines attitudes toward sex in Talmudic rabbinic writings. (The Talmud is a collection of rabbis’ interpretations of the Hebrew Bible, and was compiled between the second and fifth centuries CE.) In a reading of rabbinic interpretations of the Genesis text, in which the creation of humans is described, Boyarin summarizes the rabbinic views: “[M]arriage is a return to the condition of completeness... that reconstructs the Divine Image in which the original... [androgynous being] was created” (46). This interpretation draws from the following Genesis texts:

- The portrayal of an original human being of indeterminate gender, created in “the image of God” (Genesis 1:27).
- The splitting of that being into male and female parts (Genesis 2:21-23).
- The injunction to marriage, a reconnection to breach the physical split between the two genders (Genesis 2:24, 3:16).

Dorff, Elliot N. *“This Is My Beloved, This Is My Friend”*: A Rabbinic Letter on Intimate Relations. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 1996.

Summary: Dorff discourages premarital sex (especially sex with no intended future commitment) and promotes abstinence until marriage.

The Conservative Jewish denomination seeks to preserve traditional Jewish law in a way that is acceptable in the contemporary world. Conservative rabbi Elliot Dorff has written this position

paper for the Rabbinical Assembly (the official international association of Conservative rabbis). Dorff discusses unmarried heterosexual sex in two main contexts: between “unmarried adults... in the context of an ongoing, loving relationship” (30), or between people seeking only physical pleasure.

The latter kind of sex is less moral than the former, because it violates a number of Jewish values based on human dignity. Although sex only for pleasure is technically permitted within a Jewish framework, Dorff highly discourages it, and urges these kinds of sexual partners to try to stick to as many Jewish values as possible in their actions. For instance, partners must show a Jewish concern for “health and safety” by using protection against sexually transmitted infections (32-33).

To encourage more sex within marriage, rather than outside it, Dorff discourages teenagers from doing anything more intense than kissing. He also asks the Jewish community to promote early marriage when it is appropriate for two partners. Early marriage can help prevent premarital sex. Since dating relationships can easily turn into marriage, Jews of all ages should date only Jews, to prevent intermarriage (marriages between Jews and non-Jews, which Dorff looks upon unfavorably).

Overall, Dorff emphasizes marriage as the proper Jewish context for sex, because it is the only place for “companionship, procreation,... the education of the next generation... [and a] life-long commitment” to one’s partner (31).

Dresner, Samuel, and Byron Sherwin. *Judaism: The Way of Sanctification*. New York: United Synagogue of America, 1978.

Summary: Dresner and Sherwin present the negative aspects of premarital sex and indirectly urge unmarried readers to practice abstinence until marriage.

The Conservative Jewish denomination seeks to preserve traditional Jewish law in a way that is acceptable in the contemporary world. Conservative rabbi Samuel Dresner and Byron Sherwin discuss premarital sex in the form of a letter exchange between a college freshman and her married sister. The student, Cindy, feels peer-pressured to have premarital sex. The married sister, Debbie, who is committed to traditional Jewish observance, presents a case against premarital sex. Marriage is the only genuine atmosphere for love, stabilizing Jewish families and bonding people to each other. Love is “a commitment of all of me for the rest of my life” (196).

Premarital sex is an important Jewish issue, not just an aspect of the tradition that can be disregarded, because “one precept which the Jew has always regarded as basic is what one does with one’s own body” (205). Debbie expresses her skepticism that unmarried relationships can be meaningful enough for sex. She also presents various negative consequences of premarital sex, such as pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and emotional pain.

Debbie’s advice to Cindy includes abstinence until marriage (redefined as “premarital fidelity” to the future spouse [205]), and early marriage if possible.

After this fictional exchange, Dresner and Sherwin offer some contemporary quotes about premarital sex, and give discussion questions to encourage personal reflection on the topic.

Frankiel, Tamar. *The Voice of Sarah: Feminine Spirituality and Traditional Judaism*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990.

Summary: Frankiel sees marriage as the proper place for Jewish women to exercise sexuality in a spiritual manner.

As an observant Jewish feminist, Tamar Frankiel reads several Biblical narratives for a traditional Jewish perspective on women's sexuality and spirituality.

- Ruth and Tamar, of the Book of Ruth, use sex in a “righteous” way (27). Ruth, in a time of poverty, secures the material protection of a rich husband by being sexually forward with him. Tamar takes decisive sexual action in order to bear a son, an ancestor to King David, when otherwise she would have had to wait too long to have a son with the husband to whom she had been assigned.
- Esther, of the Book of Esther, uses sex to save the Jewish people. Faced with knowledge of a genocidal plot against all the Jews in the Persian Empire, Esther requests that the king (her husband) halt the execution. To make her request, she draws upon his sexual attraction to her. By being compliant to the king's sense of honor, Esther uses her feminine “hidden power” (31) to accomplish a great deed quietly (31).
- Judith, of the Apocryphal Book of Judith, uses her “sexuality in the service of the Jewish people” (34). She sexually seduces a military enemy of the Jewish people in order to kill him.

Frankiel defends the idea of sex as a direct reflection of a woman's “feminine being” and “inner spiritual self” (36). Because sex should be for a higher purpose than the individual's desire, “sexuality is holy” only within the context of proper Jewish marriage (35).

Gold, Michael. *Does God Belong in the Bedroom?* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992.

Summary: Gold urges Jews to practice sex only within the highest ethical context – marriage – and to create alternatives to premarital sex for unmarried people. However, Gold is also sympathetic to the difficulties of abstaining from sex before marriage.

The Conservative Jewish denomination seeks to preserve traditional Jewish law in a way that is acceptable in the contemporary world. As a Conservative rabbi, Michael Gold recognizes the tension between Jewish ethical ideals and the “real situations” of the people he counsels (xiii). Although ideals are obviously best, Jews should be sympathetic to human moral inconsistencies in behavior (184). They should also, however, recognize the value of Jewish moral hierarchies: “*Not all decisions are equal*” (184, Gold's emphasis).

In a chapter entitled, “Is Living Together Immoral?,” Gold gives a good summary of Jewish views on premarital sex, from Biblical acceptance of the *pilagshut* relationship (sexual relations between a man and an unmarried woman), to progressively negative views of that relationship and positive views of marriage. The Talmudic rabbis started the trend of negative views toward premarital sex. Gold thinks that they were “trying to protect the institution of marriage” (68).

Today, many Jews no longer see premarital sex as unconditionally problematic. Rabbis such as Gold must deal with issues such as whether to retain the traditional wording of the *ketubah* (Jewish marriage contract), which states that the bride is a virgin, when that is no longer the reality for many Jewish women in the United States. On this issue, Gold argues that Jews should keep the traditional wording as an ideal, if not a reality (70). Premarital sex, while not “unethical,” is not holy either (71). However, rabbis should not be harsh when counseling Jews who come to them with questions about premarital sex (71).

How can a Jewish sexual ethics be cultivated in the modern world? Gold lays out guidelines for parents to teach their children, in order to foster ethics that will help them make their own decisions about premarital sex. These values must be authoritative, not permissive or lax. They include “self-esteem” (163), “positive body image” (165), “accurate information” (167), “Jewish values” (169), “a sense of holiness” (171), and parents’ “setting an example” (172). Parents should have honest discussions with children about sexual ethics and safe sex.

Although premarital sex is not the ideal behavior, the realities of late marriage make it a tempting choice for many young Jews. Gold suggests a highly unconventional alternative to premarital sex – masturbation. Although Talmudic rabbinic sources frown upon masturbation, they are based upon the rabbis’ lack of solid information about masturbation (according to Gold), rather than on the Torah. Masturbation is not dangerous physically or reproductively, and it is very common. If it is encouraged as a means to an end (limiting premarital sex), rather than an end in itself, it can offer a realistic way to keep sex drives in check.

Gold, Michael. *God, Love, Sex, and Family: A Rabbi's Guide for Building Relationships that Last*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998.

Summary: Gold promotes exclusively marital sex as a way to uphold traditional Jewish understandings of ethics, family, and spirituality.

The Conservative Jewish denomination seeks to preserve traditional Jewish law in a way that is acceptable in the contemporary world. As a Conservative rabbi, Michael Gold carves a middle path between condemning and condoning modern lifestyles, including premarital sex.

In a section entitled, “Ethical but Not Holy Sex: Living Together” (185-186), Gold acknowledges that traditional Judaism does not forbid premarital sex. However, Gold thinks that religious leaders should not let the issue go unnoticed. “Sex outside marriage becomes a way of avoiding the holiness ideals of marriage, fidelity, and family” (186). For instance, promiscuous premarital sex can make adultery during marriage more likely (184).

Gold contrasts what he calls the “animal level” (185), or mere physicality, of premarital sex with what he sees as the higher level of marital sex, in which people understand themselves as the “spiritual level of creatures built in God’s image” (185). Gold urges his readers, assumed to be heterosexual, to strive for the *ideal* behavior they can achieve (marital sex) rather than settling for less.

Gordis, Robert. *Love and Sex: A Modern Jewish Perspective*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1978.

Summary: Gordis asks Jews to commit to exclusively marital sex in order to ensure the future of the Jewish people.

The Conservative Jewish denomination seeks to preserve traditional Jewish law in a way that is acceptable in the contemporary world. Conservative rabbi Robert Gordis, in an examination of traditional Jewish versus modern attitudes toward sex, includes a section called “Sex without Marriage—Center of the New Life Style” (162-176). He acknowledges that Jewish history has always seen heterosexual premarital sex, and that rabbinic attitudes toward this behavior have been ambivalent. Rabbis such as Ramban (short for Rabbi Moses ben Nachman), who wrote in the religiously diverse atmosphere of medieval Spain, have sometimes adopted the values of their non-Jewish neighbors in permitting premarital sex for Jews. However, Jews have mostly been committed to heterosexual monogamous marriage as “the best hope for the well-being of the greatest number of men, women, and children” (174).

Sex outside of marriage has increased greatly since the 1960s, along with a decreased commitment to marriage. Jews seeking meaningful relationships must oppose premarital sex because it “undermines the uniqueness of marriage and threatens the long-term happiness” of couples (176).

Green, Alan S. *Sex, God, and the Sabbath: The Mystery of Jewish Marriage*. Cleveland, OH: Temple Emanu El, 1979.

Summary: Green sees exclusively marital sex as an integral and unalterable aspect of Jewish tradition.

Rabbi Alan Green’s lyrical book links sex, God, and the Sabbath holiday as fundamental aspects of Judaism. All of these elements hold together the traditional “Jewish home,” which is “crucial to the very survival of the Jew” in a society of widespread assimilation (53). Jews have traditionally viewed marital sex as a “communion” embodied in the Jewish liturgy’s marital imagery; in the rabbinic saying, “No man without woman, no woman without man, no couple without God” (28); and in Kabbalistic (Jewish mystical) notions of how “our oneness as man and woman [through heterosexual marital sex] is a deep part of the whole Grand Design” intended in God’s plan for the universe (83).

Today, however, sex is becoming unhinged from its traditional symbolic significance, and is empty and hollow outside its marital context. To correct this problem, modern Jews must look toward marriage for “authenticity, genuine inward relationships, and a sense of being attuned to nature and to the ultimate purposes of existence” (12). Otherwise, Jews will continue to move

toward a separation of “sex from love, and love from commitment, and marriage from children, and all of these from God” (90). Green argues instead for a holistic unity of all of these elements in the context of a traditional Jewish household.

Greenberg, Blu. “Integrating Mikveh and Modernity.” *Sh’ma* 11, no. 205 (January 9, 1980) 37-38.

Summary: Greenberg applies a traditional Jewish sexual ritual to the act of premarital sex, to help observant couples make premarital sex as ethical as possible.

Blu Greenberg is a pioneering figure in the Jewish Orthodox feminist movement. In an article about the *mikveh* (a Jewish ritual system used within marriage to ensure proper sexual purity at all times), Greenberg gives some brief advice for heterosexual “unmarried sexual partners observing *niddah* [the Jewish family laws of sexual purity] and *mikveh*.” She formulates a code of sexual ethics stating that relationships should include more than sex; that “relationships mean commitment and sacrifice”; and that *niddah* is a good way to maintain a serious unmarried heterosexual relationship because observing its rigorous details makes non-monogamous sex impossible (38).

Harris, Monford. “Reflections on the Sexual Revolution.” *Conservative Judaism* 20, no. 3 (Spring 1966) 1-17.

Summary: Harris finds unmarried relationships an unacceptable context for sex, despite a history of Western beliefs to the contrary.

Professor Monford Harris, writing in the journal *Conservative Judaism* in 1966, attacks the newly emerging sexual revolution movement. Rather than see the movement as something new and original, he places it in a long Western history of conflicted attitudes toward sex – a constant psychological tension between “personal” and “impersonal” sex (17). Westerners have always struggled with the question of whether marriage is the right place for sex. Gnostic Christian movements have seen sexuality as an “evil... temptation” to be either resisted entirely or totally indulged in (10). The medieval Christian tradition of courtly love saw true love as impossible within marriage, and only possible in unmarried relationships.

Today’s sexual revolution continues the tradition of rejecting marital sex for other forms of sex, although sex outside of marriage is much more visible today than ever before. However, despite this long tradition of scorning marital sex, it remains wrong to advocate unmarried sex for the expression of love, pleasure, or for any other reason (according to Harris). Love, meaning, and personal identity can exist only when someone can see a sexual partner as not just a physical body but also as a full person with integrity.

In Genesis, when the married Adam and Eve have sex for the first time, the Hebrew text reads that Adam “knew” (*yada*) his wife. To Harris, this word implies that one can come to “know” someone – physically and spiritually – only through a marital sexual relationship. This knowing connects a person to his or her partner, and to his or her own self, in the deepest and most meaningful way.

Harris, Monford. "Pre-Marital Sexual Experience: A Covenantal Critique." *Judaism* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1970) 134-144.

Summary: Harris maintains that sex can be meaningful only within a covenant, a formalized type of relationship important in traditional Jewish thought.

To write about premarital sex, Professor Monford Harris first lays out the idea of covenant as "[t]he central category of Jewish thinking and the controlling reality of Jewish existence" (134). Unfortunately, he does not explicitly define a Jewish covenant, but he does touch upon its nature as a formalized, long-term commitment between two parties. In a Jewish context, it can be made between two people, between God and a person, or between God and the entire Jewish people.

In traditional Jewish understandings of interpersonal covenants, any intentional physical contact between two people must happen within the framework of a covenantal relationship, such as marriage. (The traditional Jewish marriage ceremony uses covenantal language to establish the marital bond.) However, premarital sex occurs outside of this covenant, thus rejecting any commitment to a greater good above and beyond one's own subjective pleasure. Outside a covenant, sex is meaningless; within a marital covenant, however, sex is linked with "clarity of vision and of acuteness of hearing the covenantal word" (144).

Isaacs, Ronald. *Every Person's Guide to Jewish Sexuality*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000.

Summary: Isaacs sees most rabbis, historical and contemporary, as opposing premarital sex.

The Conservative Jewish denomination seeks to preserve traditional Jewish law in a way that is acceptable in the contemporary world. In this overview of traditional Jewish rules about sexuality, Conservative rabbi Ronald Isaacs includes a section called "Premarital Sex" (39-46). He gives a brief overview of rabbinic debates about premarital sex, concluding that rabbis on the whole encourage marital sex over all other kinds. With excerpts from five modern rabbis, spanning the range from Reform to Orthodox, Isaacs gives the impression that most modern rabbis, following their predecessors, insist that sex exclusively within the context of marriage is "consistent with Jewish ethics" (44).

Kaufman, Debra Renee. *Rachel's Daughters: Newly Orthodox Jewish Women*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991.

Summary: The observant women in Kaufman's study reject premarital sex as a secular American behavior inappropriate for an Orthodox context.

Researcher Debra Kaufman interviews *ba'alot teshuvah*, or Jewish women who have chosen to "return" to Judaism (to become more observant than their non-religious parents). These women tend to find secular U.S. culture spiritually unfulfilling. Regarding sex, they contrast the joy of their heterosexual married sexual relationships with the meaninglessness of "casual sexual relationships" outside marriage, as one interviewee puts it (8). After these women have entered

the Orthodox world, sex transforms from an individualistic act of self-gratification into a “communal and spiritual act” performed according to religious law. That is, sex is no longer linked merely to “individual needs or wants” but also to the “timeless truths” of Orthodox belief (70).

Lamm, Maurice. *The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage*. Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David, 1991.

Summary: Lamm explains why Orthodox views value marital sex more highly than premarital sex, although the latter is not technically forbidden.

Orthodox rabbi Maurice Lamm explains traditional Jewish sexual ethics, which basically sees a Jewish heterosexual marriage as the context for all truly meaningful sex. Jewish writings and traditions portray marriage as a “binding covenant recognized by God and by society” (31). Indeed, in creating the first two humans as a married couple, God laid out a blueprint for a fulfilling human partnership. Within a proper marriage, and under the right circumstances, sex can be mysterious, “spiritual” (33), and “sanctified” (32). Outside of marriage, beyond God’s plan for deep human connection, sex becomes “primitive, impersonal, casual, [and] biological” (31).

Lamm gives a brief discussion of premarital sex. In the Jewish legal framework, premarital sex is a gray area. A Jewish man and a Jewish woman who have had premarital sex can still marry, “as long as they were not prohibited partners at the time of their cohabitation” (92). (The definition of “prohibited partners” is outside the scope of this summary.) However, it is important to remember that while premarital sex is not technically forbidden, it is certainly “not condoned” (92).

Lehrer, Evelyn L. “Religion as a Determinant of Entry into Cohabitation and Marriage.” In *The Ties that Bind: Perspectives on Marriage and Cohabitation*. Ed. Linda J. Waite. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2000, 227-252.

Summary: Based on the general liberalism of U.S. Jewish women, Lehrer predicts that future social scientific studies will find these Jewish women more likely than other women to cohabit before marriage.

Researcher Evelyn Lehrer’s social scientific study predicts whether U.S. women in several religious groups (Judaism and four Christian groups) are likely to cohabit before marriage. Lehrer finds that U.S. Jewish women, compared to their Christian counterparts, marry later, obtain more education, are more career-oriented, have the lowest fertility, and hold “liberal attitudes toward premarital sex” (231). Based on these data, Lehrer predicts that future studies will find Jewish women more likely than other women to cohabit before marriage.

Leo, Levi. *Modern Liberation: A Torah Perspective on Contemporary Lifestyles*. Brooklyn, NY: Hemed, 1998.

Summary: Levi rejects a secular ideal of sexual liberation for a traditional Jewish code of sexual ethics, which “liberates” Jews from the problems caused by premarital sex by promoting heterosexual marriage as the proper context for sex.

Leo Levi contrasts Torah-based Jewish ethics with those promoted by modern lifestyles of “liberation” (6). In a portion of his book about sex, he distinguishes between the fulfillment of marital sex and the hollowness of unmarried sex. Proper Jewish marital sex is procreative, and is “a vehicle to holiness” (50). Husbands’ and wives’ marriages are reminiscent of the Genesis creation story in which the first human being, created as one body, split into a male and a female being. Men and women “as individuals... are incomplete; they are meant to unite to form a new organism—a family” (33). Even more, romantic love “may be prerequisite to the full feeling of love for God” (48).

Sex outside of marriage, on the other hand, “is an end in itself and hence, in a sense, sterile” (50). The key dangers of unmarried sex are its objectification of human beings, its unsuccessful and cheap imitation of the marital bond, and its non-binding nature, even in the case of couples who intend to marry (58).

What, then, should be done to prevent premarital sex? Levi acknowledges that “early marriage,” while ideal (57), is not realistic for everyone. However, individuals can avoid sexual temptation before they are married. Torah study, career-building, and other non-sexual pursuits can help Jews avoid sexual temptation and improper thoughts. In this way, each Jew can put himself or herself into the right mindset to start a family life eventually.

Following the Torah’s commandments makes possible “personal happiness, and ultimately a healthy society” (182), in which the traditional family unit protects against the troubling effects of modern broken homes. Levi’s concept of Torah-based liberation, in which adherence to Jewish law paves the way for true happiness, can replace the modern paradigm of individual “liberation,” which emphasizes an ethics based on self-interest.

Morris, Bonnie J. *Lubavitcher Women in America: Identity and Activism in the Postwar Era*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998.

Summary: The highly observant women in Morris’ study oppose premarital sex as a force that weakens marriage and thus the future of the Jewish community.

Researcher Bonnie Morris studies Lubavitcher (a type of ultra-Orthodox) women in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, who seek to recruit less religious Jewish women to join their community. The Lubavitcher women have a particularly strong aversion to birth control and abortion – an aversion shaped by the Jewish demographic destruction of the Holocaust, and the current worldwide Jewish fertility decline. Along with many other threats to the nuclear procreative family, premarital sex is seen as one of many contemporary “barriers to [traditional] Jewish motherhood [and traditional family life] and... detractors from the dwindling Jewish population or gene pool” (126).

Plaskow, Judith. “Sexuality and *Teshuva*: Leviticus 18.” In *Beginning Anew: A Woman’s Companion to the High Holy Days*. Eds. Gail Twersky Reimer and Judith A. Kates. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997, 290-302.

Summary: Plaskow formulates a code of sexual ethics that avoids the traditional Jewish focus on impurity and pollution, and that addresses issues of sexual abuse (such as incest and rape) in a

public forum. This new code of sexual ethics would sanction sexual relationships outside the traditional boundaries of heterosexual marriage.

In a brief article, Jewish feminist theologian Judith Plaskow discusses her reactions to Leviticus 18. This text is usually read at afternoon services on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. In keeping with the theme of the day (divine judgment for human sins), Leviticus 18 establishes a code of sexual ethics by prohibiting various forms of incest, homosexuality, adultery, bestiality, and sex during menstruation. Because of modern controversy over Leviticus 18, some non-Orthodox congregations on Yom Kippur replace this chapter with Leviticus 19. This alternate text deals with less controversial commandments, such as “Love thy neighbor as thyself.”

Plaskow, however, seeks an alternative to both chapters. While Leviticus 19 is morally valuable, Plaskow affirms that Jewish communities must address sexual ethics and abuses in a public forum on the Day of Atonement. By not addressing sexual ethics at all, Jewish communities fail to discuss seriously the incest and sexual abuse in Jewish communities.

While Leviticus 18 does address sexual ethics, Plaskow finds it deeply problematic. As a patriarchal text, Leviticus 18 is centered around “the honor and authority of male heads of households” (293), as reinforced through various sexual boundaries and regulations. Leviticus 18 does not focus on the victims of incest or sexual abuse, but rather on the acts that degrade the reputation of the heads of households. Additionally, Plaskow finds unacceptable the text’s view of menstruating women as “polluting” (294), of homosexuality as forbidden, and of sex in general as a series of thou-shalt-nots, with “no *positive* vision of holy sexuality” (295, Plaskow’s emphasis).

Plaskow’s solution to the inadequacy of both Leviticus 18 and 19 is to “form a new sexual ethic” (298). This sexual ethic will draw from Leviticus 19’s concern for “justice” rather than Leviticus 18’s concern about pollution (298). Plaskow then presents her work in progress: a code of sexual ethics being written by members of several liberal Jewish groups, such as gay and lesbian synagogues. The key themes of this new code address the interpersonal and communal aspects of sexuality in a sexually positive and self-affirmative manner. In this code, special care is taken to protect vulnerable groups from sexual exploitation.

While Plaskow’s code of ethics does not address premarital sex *per se*, it celebrates various forms of egalitarian, consensual “human sexual diversity” as part of “the richness and diversity of life” (301).

Raphael, Melissa. “‘Refresh Me with Apples, for I am Faint with Love’ (Song of Songs 2.5): Jewish Feminism, Mystical Theology and the Sexual Imaginary.” In *The Good News of the Body: Sexual Theology and Feminism*. Ed. Lisa Isherwood. New York: New York University Press, 2000, 54-72.

Summary: Raphael sees a covenantal relationship as the proper context for sex, for theological reasons, but rejects the traditional teachings that heterosexual marriage is the only such covenantal relationship.

Examining Jewish feminist writings about sex, Melissa Raphael argues for a conception of sexual ethics that moves “beyond a critique of biblical and rabbinic sexual legislation” (a critique that she finds in most liberal writings on sexual ethics) and into theology (63). A feminist interpretation of *Kabbalah* (the Jewish mystical tradition) examines the mystical idea of the *Shekhinah*, the female aspect of God, who has been exiled from the wholeness of God’s being.

By conceptualizing God as female, in addition to male, Jews can restore the unity between the male and female aspects of God – a unity that many mystics have described in sexual terms. Restoring God’s unity will enable women to recognize themselves as “a mirror to God’s face” (69). This recognition occurs during “sexual union,” in an “intentionally permanent covenant of love” with another partner (68) – a covenant reflecting God’s Biblical covenant with the people of Israel.

Raphael is flexible about how these “covenantal” relationships can be formed – they need not be marital, heterosexual, or 100% Jewish, but they must be serious. According to Raphael, most “contemporary Jews regard the choice between traditional early marriage or pre-marital celibacy as both inadvisable and unrealistic” (62), and therefore her theologically-concerned model offers an alternative.

Rockman, Hannah. “Sexual Behavior among Ultra-Orthodox Jews: A Review of Laws and Guidelines.” In *Jewish Explorations of Sexuality*. Ed. Jonathan Magonet. Providence, RI: Berghahn, 1995, 191-204.

Summary: Rockman explains the ultra-Orthodox idea of one purpose of marital sex.

In order to understand observant Jewish attitudes toward premarital sex, it is important to examine how traditional communities have conceptualized marriage.

Writing for “non-Jewish [marital or sexual] therapists working with ultra-orthodox Jews” (191), Hannah Rockman summarizes what she sees as the ideal of marital sex held by most ultra-Orthodox (or Hasidic) Jews. A husband and wife, in having sex, both connect with the aspect of God that is the opposite gender. “They can both realize that through their union they are creating an ‘image of God’” (192). For details on why traditional Jews hold that this sexual connection applies only to marriage, see the summary of Daniel Boyarin’s *Carnal Israel*.

Schneider, Susan Weidman. *Jewish and Female: Choices and Changes in Our Lives Today*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985.

Summary: Schneider reviews modern Jewish women’s views (Orthodox and non-Orthodox) of how sexual ethics relate to premarital sex.

Jewish feminist author Susan Weidman Schneider gives an overview of traditional Jewish attitudes toward sex, and explores how modern women deal with those traditions. Writing about Orthodox women and men’s views of sex, Schneider decries the fact that most writings about Jewish sex are by men (215). (Schneider wrote this book in the early to mid-1980s.) “Women are still not considered full partners in the formulation of a Jewish sexual ethic,” she writes (215). To

correct the gender imbalance, she quotes an Orthodox female writer, Gila Berkowitz, at length. Berkowitz finds sex to be “primarily a form of spiritual expression” (201). Marriage is well worth waiting for, since *within* marriage, “almost anything agreeable to both partners, as long as it is done at the right time and place, is religiously sanctioned and blessed” (203).

While Schneider sees sexual ethics as important to many Orthodox women, she seems to find Orthodox men in general “adopting more permissive attitudes toward premarital sex” (214). Notably, observant Jewish women carry more of a burden than men in formulating sexual ethics for unmarried sex. Women have more sexual responsibilities, and face greater sanctions, than men on issues such as adultery and *niddah*, rituals to ensure sexual purity (214).

In general, some Jewish women (whether Orthodox, religiously non-Orthodox, or secular) are struggling to define sexual ethics relevant to their lives, in the face of a plethora of modern sexual choices. While some women adopt the mainstream Orthodox views of a proper sexual relationship, other women try to build “a new Halachah [code of Jewish law] on sexuality that will help them resolve conflicts or inconsistencies” between their religious beliefs and their premarital sexual behavior (215). To illustrate this “new Halachah,” Schneider gives a short list of non-Orthodox writings on Jewish sexual ethics.

Solomon, Lewis D. *The Jewish Tradition, Sexuality, and Procreation*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002.

Summary: Solomon sanctions the premarital engagement relationship as an acceptable context for sex for heterosexuals, in addition to the marital relationship.

Lewis Solomon presents a wide spectrum of Jewish views on issues of sex and procreation. He writes from the angle of his own philosophy, “Spiritual Judaism,” which envisions a “transformation of Judaism based on virtues, not legalistic rules, as guideposts for human behavior” (6).

Solomon claims that “the Jewish tradition stands against casual sexual relationships for mere physical pleasure, with little or no love or commitment” (37). Sex should be a spiritual expression. However, Solomon also opposes a traditional definition of the proper context for sex. While uncommitted relationships like cohabitation are a bad home for sexual relationships, due to their casual nature, it is fine (according to Lewis) for engaged couples to have sex within this more formalized relationship. In the engagement relationship, the couple’s “consciousness is more likely directed toward God, linking their sexuality and spirituality” (43). Historically, many Jews have had premarital sex after engagement and before marriage. Premarital sex in engagement relationships “will neither undermine marriage as an institution nor family life” (43).

Waskow, Arthur. *Down-to-Earth Judaism: Food, Money, Sex, and the Rest of Life*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1995.

Summary: Drawing on Jewish sexual history and modern sexual concerns, Waskow proposes a system that would allow for varying types of premarital sexual relationships prior to marriage. Steps would be taken to ensure couples understood the “sacred” nature of sex.

Independently ordained rabbi Arthur Waskow, a key figure in the liberal Jewish Renewal movement, asks how Jews can form a contemporary sexual ethics that would still “honor sexuality as sacred” (243). The traditional Jewish sexual ethic as laid out in the Hebrew Bible, and interpreted rabbinically, is inadequate (according to Waskow) because of its patriarchal structure. Its views of male dominance and its anxieties about female sexuality and impurity are unsuitable for many Jews today.

However, historical Jewish views on sex are more diverse than they would seem at first glance. Waskow identifies a long history of Jewish tensions toward sexuality. In all ages, Jewish history contains patriarchal anxieties about proper sexuality, side-by-side with less conventional views such as those in the Song of Songs or in medieval Spanish Jewish homoerotic poetry. A code of Jewish modern sexual ethics must consider the sexual diversity that has always characterized the Jewish people. It must also be based upon egalitarianism and several other modern concerns.

In his section, “Before the *Chuppah* [a *chuppah* is a Jewish wedding canopy, used as a synecdoche for a Jewish wedding],” Waskow suggests ways for unmarried Jewish couples, of various sexualities, to explore the link between spirituality and sexuality. Jews can define their relationships throughout life by degrees of seriousness. For each type of relationship, they can learn how to prepare themselves physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually, depending on the nature of the particular relationship. “By clearly affirming that each sexual act is sacred” (340), Jewish unmarried couples will understand the profound personal and interpersonal effects of their sexual relationships. The egalitarian nature of the Song of Songs makes it an ideal model for unmarried sex.

Winkler, Gershon. *Sacred Secrets: The Sanctity of Sex in Jewish Law and Lore*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998.

Summary: Winkler argues that the Bible and some rabbinic commentators permit premarital sex (with some conditions), and that Judaism should continue to permit it today.

Rabbi Gershon Winkler received his rabbinic ordination from several liberal rabbis, including the trans-denominational figure Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. In this book, Winkler argues for the *halachic* (Jewish legal) validity of heterosexual premarital sex. He explains the concept of a *pilagshut* – a “half-marriage” arrangement instituted in Biblical times. The *pilagshut* allows a man and a woman (a *pilegish*, or “half-wife” – Winkler’s translation goes against the traditional translation of “concubine”), to have sex with no marital commitment, as long as they observe the Jewish sexual purity laws called *niddah* (79).

Winkler traces the history of rabbinic views on *pilagshut*. He presents a few views that condone *pilagshut*, including a view of the famous rabbi Ramban (short for Rabbi Moses ben Nachman). On the other side, the monumental Rambam (the medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides) compared premarital sex to prostitution, and effectively forbade it. However, some later rabbis disagreed with Rambam’s stand on this issue. Their main recurring argument was that the Torah does not command marriage, just procreation (Genesis 1:28: “Be fruitful and multiply”).

Winkler says that modern Jews in the United States can take heart that their tradition is more “liberal” than the Christian-influenced society around them (95). *Pilagshut* is an acceptable

alternative to marital sex in this age of delayed marriage, because people have sexual needs to fulfill – needs of which God should be understanding.

Winkler also includes a *responsa* (rabbinic legal opinion) written by the eighteenth-century Rabbi Yaakov of Emden. Rabbi Yaakov accepted *pilagshut* as valid, so this *responsa* is highly controversial. He writes that under certain conditions, premarital sex is “completely permissible” (112). These conditions include a proper *pilagshut* relationship arranged by a rabbi (141), which must include the *niddah* (Jewish sexual purity) rituals (141), an “exclusive living-together” (126), and total monogamy on the part of the woman (141). *Pilagshut* can be a good alternative to marriage in order to prevent what Rabbi Yaakov sees as less desirable forms of promiscuity, such as sex with prostitutes or with non-Jews (120). Also, *pilagshut* enables both partners to have a relationship without the ritual burdens of marriage, in case they are not prepared to undertake full marriage or divorce rituals. The man can use *pilagshut* to acquire a mistress (126) for a variety of reasons. Overall, the *pilagshut* relationship, according to Rabbi Yaakov, is based on the Torah and cannot be annulled by the post-Torah writings of rabbis such as Rambam.

INTERNET SOURCE SUMMARIES

REFORM VIEWS

Central Conference of American Rabbis. “Jewish Attitude Towards Sexual Relations Between Consenting Adults.” Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1979. 2004. <http://www.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/respdisp.pl?file=154&year=arr> (1 Apr. 2004).

Summary: This Reform rabbinic legal opinion urges Jews not to practice premarital sex.

Reform Judaism is a liberal denomination that asks individual Jews to choose those aspects of the tradition that are most relevant to their lives. Although this *responsa* (rabbinic legal opinion) was written by Reform rabbis in 1979, it is traditional in its interpretation and application of *halacha* (Jewish law). The topic is heterosexual premarital sex. The essay traces the various measures that previous rabbis have taken to limit the possibility of premarital sex, such as keeping the two genders as separate as possible before marriage. Although Jews have always dealt with the presence of premarital sex, most rabbis have discouraged it. Today, this *responsa* advises, “We should do whatever we can to discourage casual sexual relations [i.e., outside of marriage].”

Central Conference of American Rabbis. “Long-Term Non-Marital Relationships.” Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1996. 2004. <http://www.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/respdisp.pl?file=10&year=5756> (1 Apr. 2004).

Summary: This Reform rabbinic legal opinion maintains the earlier stance that premarital sex is unacceptable.

Reform Judaism is a liberal denomination that asks individual Jews to choose those aspects of the tradition that are most relevant to their lives. This 1996 *responsa* (rabbinic legal opinion) gives a good overview of traditional Jewish laws and attitudes toward premarital sex. The authors write, “Historically... the Jewish attitude toward pre-marital sexual relations clearly moved from a stance of limited forbearance, under certain circumstances, to a more restrictive outlook.” Surprisingly, these 1996 Reform authors continue to maintain that “restrictive outlook,” echoing the 1979 position in calling for “sexuality *within* marriage ...[as] our ideal.” They explain that, in a Jewish framework, heterosexual unmarried sex (even in long-term relationships) cannot be considered holy in the way that marital sex can. Consequently, the authors reject the legitimacy of *pilagshut* (a historical Jewish system allowing a man to have sex with an unmarried woman). While unmarried partners are urged to observe Jewish ethical codes in their relationship, they still cannot sanctify their relationship Jewishly without marriage.

Central Conference of American Rabbis. “Virginity and the *Ketubah*.” Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1984. 2004. <http://www.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/respdisp.pl?file=187&year=carr> (1 Apr. 2004).

Summary: A Reform rabbinic legal opinion acknowledges that premarital sex is widespread among Reform Jews, but asks that this fact be kept out of the traditional wedding contract.

Reform Judaism is a liberal denomination that asks individual Jews to choose those aspects of the tradition that are most relevant to their lives. This 1984 *responsa* (rabbinic legal opinion) is concerned with the *ketubah*, the Jewish marriage contract. Traditionally, a *ketubah* generally indicates whether a bride is a virgin, a widow, or divorced. In modern times, many newly married Jewish women are not virgins, so would it be inaccurate to use the “virgin” designation on their *ketubot* (plural of *ketubah*)? The rabbis address this question, concluding that “it would be wise either to refrain from any kind of designation of status for the woman in the *ketubah* (for which there is ample precedent), or simply to use the designation ‘virgin’ as part of a standard formula” and also to deal with the sexual status of the groom in the same manner. (Traditional *ketubot* do not address the groom’s sexual status.)

Salkowitz, Selig. “Ad Hoc Committee on Human Sexuality.” Central Conference of American Rabbis. Jun. 1998. <http://www.ccarnet.org/hs.html> (1 Apr. 2004).

Reform Judaism is a liberal denomination that asks individual Jews to choose those aspects of the tradition that are most relevant to their lives. Writing a report to the Central Conference of American Rabbis (a Reform Jewish rabbinical association), Selig Salkowitz identifies a set of Jewish sexual values that are in line with Reform Jewish philosophy. To root each value in Jewish tradition, Salkowitz uses Hebrew words and passages from the Torah and prayerbooks. The sexual values he identifies include “dignity,” “honesty,” “health,” social “justice,” “family” (defined in a broad way), “modesty” or “privacy,” “covenantal relationship,” “joy,” “love,” and “holiness.” These values form a blueprint for modeling ethical sexual relationships of many diverse types.

Stein, Jonathan. "Toward a Taxonomy for Reform Jews to Evaluate Sexual Behavior." *CCAR Journal* (Fall 2001). Central Conference of American Rabbis. <http://www.ccarnet.org/journal/1101js.html> (1 Apr. 2004).

Reform Judaism is a liberal denomination that asks individual Jews to choose those aspects of the tradition that are most relevant to their lives. Jonathan Stein, writing in a Reform Jewish rabbinic journal, finds today's Reform Jews having difficulties integrating traditional Jewish teachings on sexuality with modern views. "A large number of people today have independently reached the conclusion that black and white approaches to issues such as pre- and extramarital sex and homosexuality are too simplistic."

Fortunately, says Stein, Judaism has traditionally approached the issue of sexuality as nuanced and complex rather than black and white. Over millennia, Jewish tradition has established a nuanced moral hierarchy of sexual behavior. Some sexual acts are promoted, such as heterosexual marital sex. Some acts are ambiguous – neither encouraged nor condemned – such as the relation between a married man and a *pilegesh* (translated as either an unmarried woman or a prostitute). And some acts, such as adultery or homosexuality, are subject to severe punishment.

Stein advises Reform Jews to strive for "an appropriate balance between the halakhic [Jewish legal] tradition and modernity." To suggest a new way of thinking about Jewish sexual ethics, Stein preserves the traditional method of ranking sexual acts, while redefining what kinds of sex to put into each category. His hierarchy ranges from formally committed and mutualistic relationships at the top ("holy"), to abusive relationships at the bottom ("abhorrent"). Sex within cohabitation falls into the "ethical" category. Sex in a non-cohabiting relationship is "tolerable" if the couple may commit in the future, and "not proper" if they do not intend to commit at all.

Stein emphasizes that this hierarchy is just a starting point for Reform Jews to think about sexual ethics with one foot in the Jewish tradition and another in the modern world.

ORTHODOX VIEWS

Lichtenstein, Aharon. "Gamara Kiddushin: Shiur Peticha - Opening Shiur on Massekhet Kiddushin." Eds. and trans. Moshe Cahan, et al. *The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash*. 1997. <http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/01petich.htm> (1 Apr. 2004).

The Israeli Orthodox *yeshiva* (religious school) Yeshivat Har Etzion runs a "virtual Beit Midrash" (place of Jewish study) through its website. This particular writing, by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, compares several different traditional views on premarital sex.

Rambam (the medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides) saw premarital sex as acceptable within a particular kind of relationship called a *kinyan*. This was an unmarried relationship sanctioned within a *halachic* (Jewish legal) framework. However, Rambam held that only a king could

establish such a relationship. Everyone else who had premarital sex would be guilty of prostitution – a Biblical transgression.

Some medieval commentators on the Talmud thought that a man could have sex with an unmarried woman, as long as she was faithful to only him. She could not prostitute herself to other men. Other medieval commentators saw all premarital sex as a violation of a Biblical commandment. However, Ramban (short for Rabbi Moses ben Nachman) wrote that premarital sex was acceptable between a man and a prostitute.

SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

- **Cochran, John K., and Leonard Beeghley. “The Influence of Religion on Attitudes toward Nonmarital Sexuality: A Preliminary Assessment of Reference Group Therapy.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30.1 (Mar. 1991): 45-62. *Sociological Abstracts*. OCLC (1 Apr. 2004).**
 - *If your school subscribes to the Sociological Abstracts database, you can access this article with accession number 91X7016 or through the following link: <http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=9705182174&db=aph>*
- **Glenn, Norval D., and Charles N. Weaver. “Attitudes Toward Premarital, Extramarital, and Homosexual Relations in the U.S. in the 1970s.” *Journal of Sex Research*, 15.2 (May 1979): 108-118. *Sociological Abstracts*. OCLC (1 Apr. 2004).**
 - *If your school subscribes to the Sociological Abstracts database, you can access this article with accession number 82M2509 or through the following link: <http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=5686880&db=aph>*
- **Mosher, W.D., and J.W. McNally 1991. “Contraceptive Use at First Premarital Intercourse: United States, 1965-1988.” *Family Planning Perspectives*, 23.3 (May/June, 1991): 108-116. *Sociological Abstracts*. OCLC (1 Apr. 2004).**
 - *If your school subscribes to the Sociological Abstracts database, you can access this article with accession number 92Z3328 or through the following link: <http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=9107222713&db=aph>*
- **Silverman, Ira J 1977. “A Survey of Cohabitation on Two College Campuses.” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 6.1 (1977): 11-20. *Sociological Abstracts*. OCLC (1 Apr. 2004).**
 - *If your school subscribes to the Sociological Abstracts database, you can access this article with accession number 77I9445.*

Each of these studies examines the views of several U.S. religious groups on issues such as premarital sex, cohabitation, extramarital sex, and homosexuality. The researchers find that, since the 1960s, U.S. Jews have generally stood on the liberal end of the spectrum regarding these issues. Additionally, Mosher and McNally find that a high proportion of Jewish women who are sexually active before marriage use contraception the first time they have sex.

VIEWS ON SEX EDUCATION

Antonelli, Judith S. “Sex education, Jewish style: Day schools ensure students learn in a protective atmosphere.” *The Jewish Advocate* 185:10 (16 March 1995). *Ethnic NewsWatch. ProQuest* (1 Apr. 2004).

If your school subscribes to the Ethnic NewsWatch database, you can access this article through the following link:

http://enw.softlineweb.com/record.asp?msel_from=0&msel_to=7&preview=&move=&returnPage=list.asp&articleID=288883&recNum=1

Judith Antonelli surveys the sex education programs in several Jewish private schools in Massachusetts, ranging from Orthodox to Reform. (It should be noted that not all Jewish private schools offer sex education programs in the first place.)

While the schools’ curricula differ somewhat, all of them try to situate biological information and sexual ethics within a framework defined as Jewish. They deal with some of the same pedagogical concerns as public schools, in determining how to present tricky information to different age and gender groups. However, the private schools emphasize that, unlike public schools, their sex education is “protective.” To help students mature gracefully, “protective” sex education introduces students to a limited amount of material, within a Jewish framework concerned about their moral as well as physical growth.

Ulman, Jane. “Jewish Ethics Should Be Part of Sex Education for Children.” *Jewish News of Greater Phoenix* 5.10 (27 Nov. 1998): 52.

If your school subscribes to the Ethnic NewsWatch database, you can access this article through the following link:

http://enw.softlineweb.com/record.asp?msel_from=0&msel_to=0&preview=&move=&returnPage=list.asp&articleID=594141&recNum=1

Jane Ulman praises her sons’ private Jewish day school for offering “a comprehensive sex education program in grades five through nine at their Jewish day school that incorporates basic biology with Jewish sexual values and laws.” The program promotes sex within a healthy marital relationship. Ulman agrees that marital sex should be the highest ideal, but thinks that her sons should get a “solid foundation in Jewish ethics” in order to make their own decisions about sex in the modern world. Those Jewish ethics include a concern for personal health and for “personal responsibility” in relationships.

Union for Reform Judaism. “Sexuality Education.” *Union for Reform Judaism*, 2001. <http://uahc.org/boston/preso/sexuality.shtml> (1 Apr. 2004).

Reform Judaism is a liberal denomination that asks individual Jews to choose those aspects of the tradition that are most relevant to their lives. This brief resolution from a 2001 conference

encourages Reform congregations to provide comprehensive sex education to Jewish youth, and to lobby for these sex education programs at all levels of government. The resolution justifies its requests with an appeal to modern behavior. "Experience with the Reform Movement's youth programs indicates that Reform Jewish youth are as sexually active as their peers." Therefore, Reform youth need to learn about safe sexual activity "in the context of healthy committed relationships."

MISCELLANEOUS

Shapiro, Rona. "A Blessing for a First Sexual Experience." Ritualwell.org. <http://ritualwell.org/Rituals/ritual.html?docid=648> (1 Apr. 2004).

Ritualwell.org is a website offering "innovative, contemporary Jewish rituals" to supplement or replace traditional ones. The site is a project of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (which represents Reconstructionist Judaism, a liberal school of Jewish philosophy) and Ma'yan, a Jewish feminist organization based in New York.

In her brief essay, Ritualwell.org editor and Conservative rabbi Rona Shapiro identifies a gap in the Jewish liturgy. Many blessings exist for various everyday and life-cycle events, but there is no blessing to say before having sex. Shapiro suggests a solution for this problem. She asks Jews to understand and to value the holiness of the sex act. Jewish parents should teach their children to say the *She-hecheyanu* blessing (a traditional blessing to commemorate a special occasion) before their first sexual experience. Because many teenagers feel pressured to have sex before they are ready, identifying their first sexual experience as holy might encourage them to wait for a meaningful relationship before having sex.